

Emerson Legislative Update -- February 2003

SENATE AND HOUSE COMMITTEES APPROVE EXECUTIVE ORDER

Both the Senate and House Appropriations committees recently approved the governor's Executive Order to balance the fiscal year 2003 budget. The plan repairs a shortfall in the state's General Fund Budget of \$158.3 million.

As priorities for the governor's administration, the following initiatives did not receive any cuts: Medicaid and mental health services, revenue sharing payments, benefits for needy families and disabled adults on welfare, Welfare-to-Work programs, foster parent rates and payments for child care agencies, child day care benefits, local public health operations funding, services to veterans, and environmental protection programs.

SENATE CONFIRMS NEWEST CABINET APPOINTMENTS

The Senate has confirmed the governor's newest cabinet appointments. Janet Olszewski will head the Department of Community Health. Prior to her nomination, Olszewski served as Vice-President of Government Programs and Regulations for M-CARE.

Teresa Takai will be the new director of the Department of Information and Technology. Takai previously served as an executive at Federal Mogul, Ford Motor Company, and Electronic Data Systems.

BILL CALLS FOR PUBLIC SCRUTINY OF AUTO INSURANCE FEE

Legislation was recently introduced calling for the Michigan Catastrophic Claims Association (MCCA) to be subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and the Open Meetings Act.

Every auto insurance policyholder in the state pays the MCCA assessment. The amount is set each year by insurance industry representatives in a closed meeting. The MCCA assesses the fee to cover auto accident medical expenses over \$300,000. Since its inception in 1978, the fee has ranged from \$3 to \$118 per vehicle. Currently the fee is set at \$69.

SENATE APPROVES MEASURE TO PREVENT GREAT LAKES WATER DIVERSION

The Senate recently approved a resolution seeking to protect the Great Lakes from water diversions. Senate Resolution 10 urges the International Joint Commission to maintain its vigilance in opposing diversion of Great Lakes water. The resolution also calls on the commission to resolve any issues relating to the finalization of Annex 2001.

Annex 2001 is part of the Great Lakes Charter, which was signed by the eight Great Lakes governors and the premiers of Ontario and Quebec. The charter outlines the principles for the collective management of the Great Lakes by the Great Lakes states and provinces.